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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 001584

SIPDIS

FOR AF/PD (WHITMAN); AF/W, R

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2007

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SUBJECT: MUSLIM WORLD OUTREACH -- GHANA

REF: STATE 155954

Classified By: PAO DQUEEN. REASONS 1.4 (B & D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Since the events of 9/11/01 Post has made special efforts to increase contacts with and outreach to Ghana's Muslim community. Post relations with most elements of this community, which is far from monolithic, are very good and, with some groups, they are excellent. We have focused increasingly on those sects and groups that post has identified as being most susceptible to anti-American propaganda and maneuvering, with special emphasis on youth and students. Paras below keyed to elements outlined refel. END SUMMARY

A. CONTEXT

2. (C) Ghana's Muslim population is approximately 20% of a country of 20 million. The rest are primarily Christians, representing many denominations, along with a small percentage of animists. While the north of the country is primarily Muslim, all of Ghana's large urban areas have significant, long-established Muslim populations that have mostly migrated from northern rural areas. Ghana's Muslims are divided into four main sects, two of which represent different strains of Sunnism, plus smaller groupings of Shia'a and Ahmadiya. The Alhussunna Wal-Jama'a Sunni sect hosts Wahabi missionaries and is more fundamentalist than the other group, the Tijanniya. Muslims in Ghana generally perceive themselves as marginalized from the mainstream Christian culture and the economic and political power they believe Christians monopolize. Some Muslims acknowledge that this marginalization is a partially self-inflicted distancing due to longstanding fear of proselytization and conversion.

3. (C) The leadership of the middle-of-the-road Tijanniya has exerted a moderating influence over its younger, more radical elements and, to a certain extent, with the more Islamist Alhussunna. At the leadership level, the two factions get along fairly well, although both face resistance from younger and more impatient radicals, especially in Accra and Kumasi, Ghana's second city. The Shia'a maintain a fairly low profile, accepting assistance from Iran, although the Iranian mission does not confine its outreach to Shia'a. In the overcrowded and underserved urban slums where many unemployed Muslim young men live, discontent with U.S. policy in the Middle East, and with a government that is viewed as a close ally of the U.S., is a potentially volatile and exploitable negative force.

4. (C) Ghana has been predominantly free of the religious communal violence that has taken place in other West African countries. For the most part, Christian-Muslim relations are good. Even in the most deprived urban areas, where members of all faiths are crowded together, disagreements do not escalate into religion-based strife. Nevertheless, this tolerance has in the past been characterized by a degree of fragility. PAO was told by an official of the Christian Council of Ghana, which maintains an interfaith working group with Muslim religious leaders, that a few years back young Muslim men in the poorest sections of Accra had coalesced into ad hoc gangs that threatened the peace in their neighborhoods. Only the level-headed leadership of the Alhussunna Chief Imam prevented major incidents of violence.

B. ENGAGEMENT

----- Formal Institutions -----

5. (C) Post engages with a number of institutions and NGO's in the Muslim community, although some are more accessible than others. The National Chief Imam, his office, and organizations associated with it, are prime interlocutors with mission officers. These are adherents of the Tijanniya sect, espousing moderate interpretations of Islam, although many younger Tijanniya have expressed impatience with the lack of forcefulness and the relatively pro-American stance of the National Chief Imam. Moreover, the other Muslim sects respect the National Chief Imam, but do not necessarily agree with his positions or follow his leadership. Nevertheless, his moral authority and his role as titular leader of Ghana's Muslims, make the institution he heads and its affiliate organizations critical contacts for this post. In a high-profile gesture, he and his senior staff recently

attended the Ambassador's July 4th reception.

16. (C) A smaller structure exists under the Chief Imam of the Alhussunna. They have a less liberal interpretation of their religion than the Tijanniya, making them, if anything, a more important target for post contact and programs. The Chief Imam himself is a man of good sense and good will, but it is not clear how strong a grip he has over the most militant factions within his sect, especially the youth. Thus, post officers are making a greater effort to engage younger Muslim audiences, particularly among the Alhussunna. All the Muslim communities have youth organizations and NGO's, some directly affiliated with the offices of the national and regional imams, and some nominally independent. Also, there are chapters of the Muslim Student Association of Ghana on the university campuses, and serious post efforts are directed at them. It is not always easy to identify which groups are the most influential, or have the most potential for causing problems. Despite our limited human and financial resources, post is addressing this issue.

1C. CURRENT PROGRAMS

Representation

17. (U) The mission uses a multi-layered approach to engage the Muslim community, some of which relies on funding from ORCA. We initiated a series of events that targeted large and influential audiences, generating a great deal of publicity. During Ramadan, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner for Muslim leaders, also including leaders from the Christian denominations. Working through national and regional Imams, the mission funded food distribution in poor Muslim neighborhoods in and around Accra. For youth, we organized soccer tournaments in Accra and Kumasi, in collaboration with a Muslim NGO, with teams competing for prizes. Last year's final game started with a kickoff by the U.S. Ambassador and was attended by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports. Following Ramadan, the DCM led a delegation of post officers to present a ram and rice to the National Chief Imam, following local custom. The mission worked with the MinEd's Islamic Education Unit to provide prizes to winners of popular student radio quiz show that was specially designed to focus on Islamic history and culture. (The prize presentation was held at PAS, with first prize going to students from the Iran-funded Islamic University.)

DOD Humanitarian Assistance

18. (U) The Office of Defense Cooperation has carried out humanitarian projects in Muslim neighborhoods with Navy Seabee construction crews (e.g., a community center for the Alhussunna near the mosque in the poor Muslim ghetto in Accra), that have cemented relationships and received positive media attention. When a post-organized site visit by General Charles F. Wald (EUCOM Deputy Commander) fell through July 15th, the Ambassador filled in. All local Imams expressed appreciation for U.S. military assistance in building their community center in Nima. At the Islamic School donation of U.S. textbooks, the Chief Imam said the U.S. military needs to know that they have friends in Nima. ODC is working with USAID to identify other projects for the Muslim population, including drilling boreholes in the water-starved north of Ghana.

Development and Education

19. (U) Still in the public diplomacy domain, post organized a series of presentations to inform Muslim leaders of USG development programs in Ghana and encourage them to have their followers and communities participate. One was a roundtable discussion on education, bringing together USAID, Peace Corps and Public Affairs Section to discuss how Muslims in every region of Ghana might take advantage of the various agencies' education initiatives. Our presentations in Accra and Kumasi targeted student groups, urban youth organizations and civic leaders, providing fora for mission agency heads to increase awareness among Muslims of what the USG was doing for development in Ghana, how Muslim communities were benefiting, and how others might do the same. PAS has brought groups of Muslim students for briefings on services provided by the Information Resource Center (IRC) and the Education Advising Center. PAS used the above-mentioned prize ceremony to brief Muslim university students on PAS services, and sign them up for membership in the IRC. The Mission International Visitor committee targets Muslim leaders for IV projects, recently including officials of women's organizations and the Muslim heads of the youth wings of the Ghana's two major political parties. Muslim students participated in a SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) competition, an indication that self-enforced isolation is being replaced with engagement, thus creating openings for increased tertiary education programming.

Individual Outreach

10. (SBU) Post officers have represented and explained U.S. positions and programs to Muslims, one-on-one, to small groups and larger audiences. This has been a highly-effective way to engage people in a culture that puts great store on face-to-face encounters and personal relationships. It also involves keeping an open door, usually at PAS, so that Muslim friends can drop in for a chat or have meetings with EmbOffs. Officers have accepted invitations to speak before large groups on issues of policy and respond to questions on those areas that particularly trouble Muslims. One officer gave a talk to students at the Islamic University, never before visited by an embassy officer, at the invitation of students who had participated in a program at the IRC.

New Initiatives

11. (C) We are expanding and replicating all of the programs and events described above to more communities and organizations. We are also planning new initiatives and more contact with students and youth, which is crucial to efforts to engender longer term trust and mutual understanding. We plan to host a speaker on Muslim life in the U.S. before the end of the current FY or early in the next. Our biggest outreach to an entire region will be launched in September, when the Ambassador opens an "American Corner", i.e., an IRC annex, in Tamale, the largest city in the Muslim majority north of Ghana. (Note: Tamale, over 400 miles from Accra, has no other permanent foreign mission presence.) PAS is supplying this facility with \$30,000 worth of books, 10 computers, along with \$22,000 supplemented through AF/PD for Internet connectivity and other equipment. This center will serve as a platform for all mission officers and agencies to program or plan representational events in that region. Tamale also is home to a public university, whose students we expect to become regular visitors to this facility.

12. (C) Muslims in Ghana are open to contact and many are eager to learn more about the U.S. Even those who oppose U.S. policies look with respect and admiration on America's social and economic accomplishments. While there are groups and individuals who are worrisome and need to be monitored, there is little evidence their numbers are growing. Post outreach efforts are now a significant counterinfluence to attempts by the most negative elements within the Muslim community to expand their influence.

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